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DOCTOR STRANGE™
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BRUNNER
"...A GATHERING OF FEAR!"

Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: DR. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

ROGER STERN WRITER * TOM SUTTON ARTIST * I. WATANABE LETTERER * P. RACHE COLORIST * JIM SHOOTER EDITOR

A GATHERING OF FEAR!

SPRINGTIME IN NEW YORK IS OFTTIMES THE SCENE OF A GREAT CONTEST BETWEEN THE LOCAL CITIZENRY...AND THE WEATHER.
POLICE
6TH PREC
THE WEATHER INVARIABLY WINS.

TODAY, THE ELEMENTS APPEAR TO BE TAKING PARTICULAR DELIGHT IN TURNING THE BASICALLY NORMAL GREENWICH VILLAGE INTO SOMETHING SURREAL.
BUT ONE MAN SEEMS HARDLY TO NOTICE THE DRIVING RAIN, THE STEAMY FOG.
HE SEEMS ALMOST A PART OF THEM...

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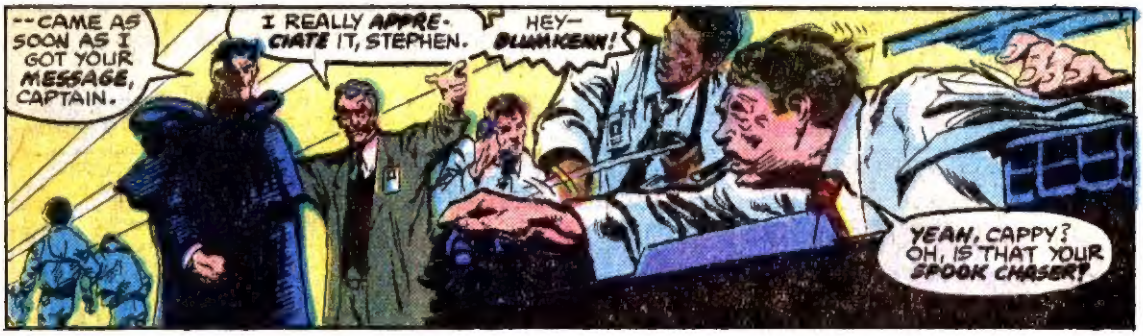
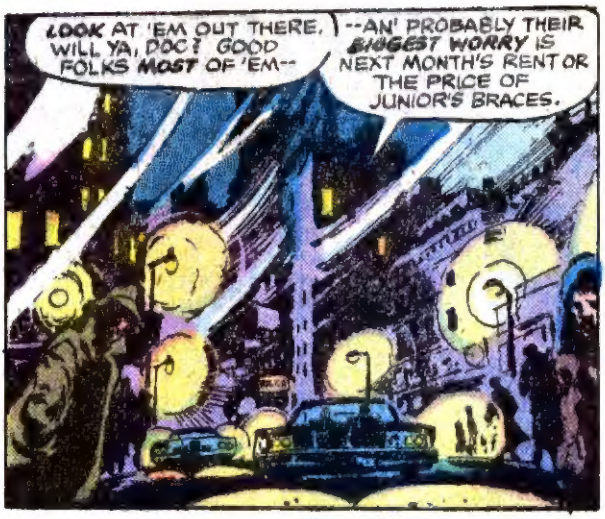
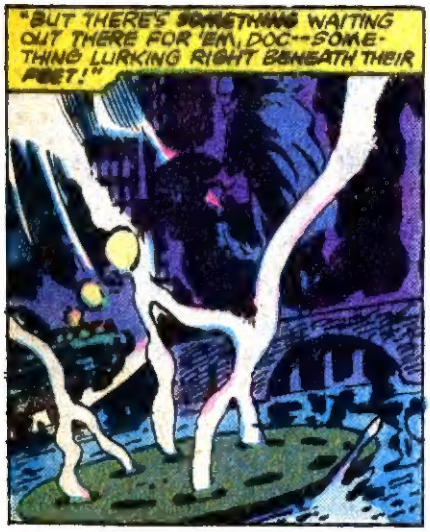

--CAME AS SOON AS I GOT YOUR MESSAGE, CAPTAIN.
I REALLY APPRECIATE IT, STEPHEN.
HEY-- BLUMKEANN!
YEAH, CAPPY? OH, IS THAT YOUR SPOOK CHASER?

BLUMKENN! THIS IS DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE!
LIEUTENANT--!
HEY, CALL ME RALPH-- EVERYBODY DOES!
UH... YOU ANY GOOD AT THIS OCCULT STUFF?

I... KNOW A FEW THINGS.
WELL, I HOPE YA KNOW MORE THAN I DO-- 'CAUSE I'M AT MY WIT'S END!


LOOK AT 'EM OUT THERE, WILL YA, DOC? GOOD FOLKS MOST OF 'EM--
--AN' PROBABLY THEIR BIGGEST WORRY IS NEXT MONTH'S RENT OR THE PRICE OF JUNIOR'S BRACES.


"BUT THERE'S SOMETHING WAITING OUT THERE FOR 'EM, DOC--SOMETHING LURKING RIGHT BENEATH THEIR FEET!"

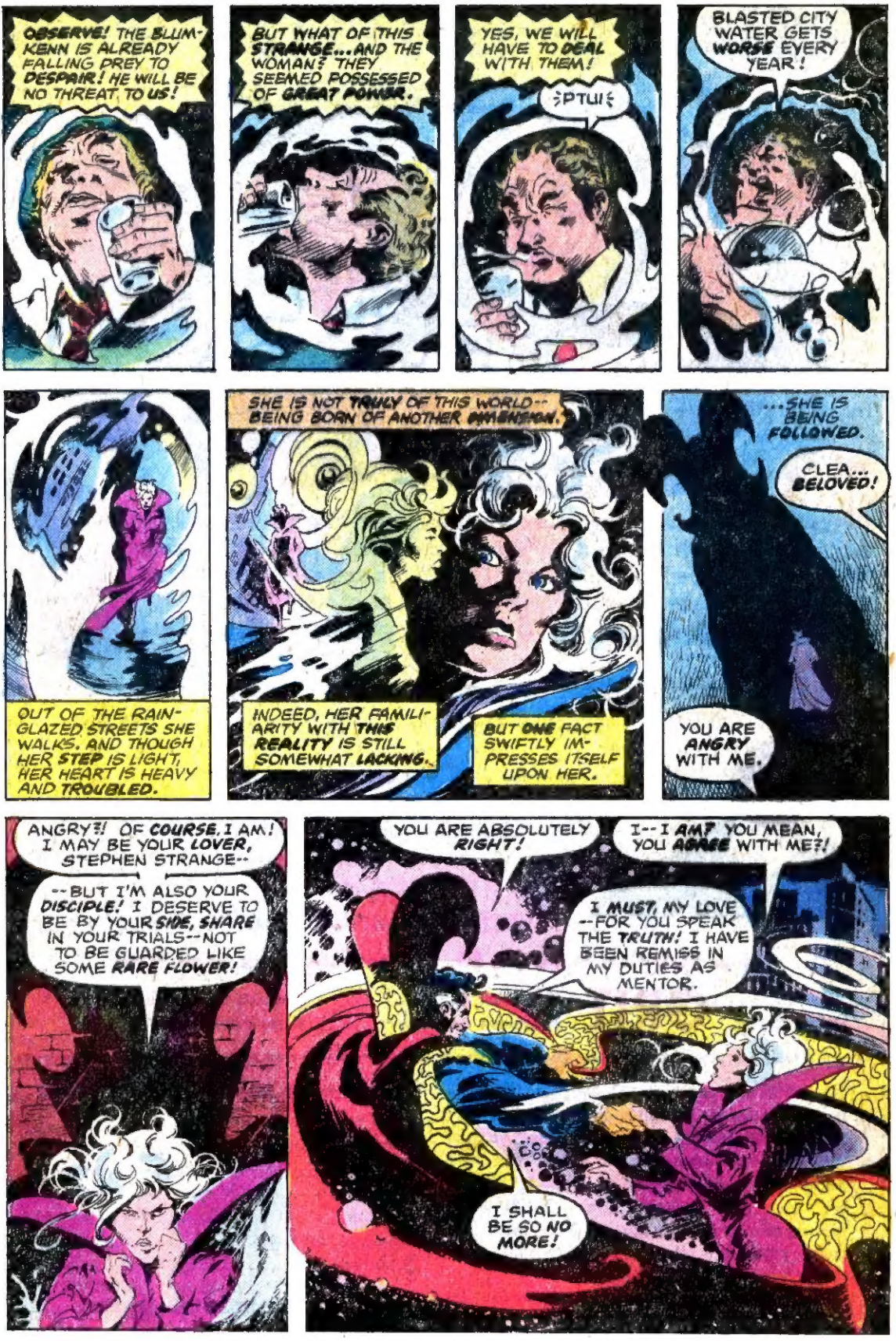
SOMETHING? WHAT KIND OF SOMETHING, LIEUTENANT?
I WISH TO HECK I KNEW, DOC.
ALL I KNOW IS ...IT'S EVIL. HEH, SOUNDS FUNNY, DOESN'T IT--

"--LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF AN OLD PULP NOVEL! BUT IT'S REAL, ALL RIGHT-- I'VE COME UP AGAINST IT BEFORE.
AND IT'S RIGHT DOWN THERE... IN THE SEWERS!

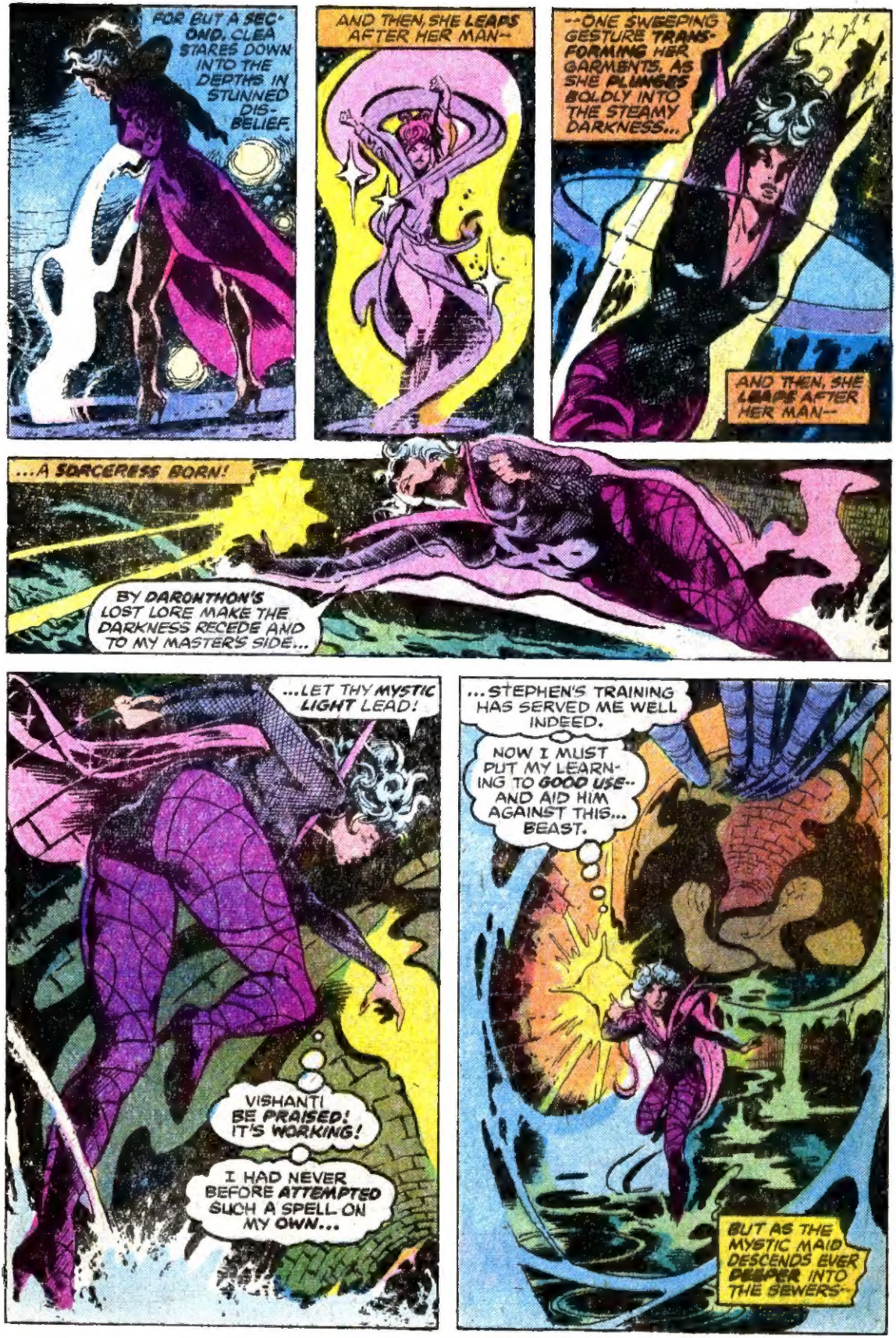
"YOU LIKE STORIES, DOC? WELL, I GOT A BEAUT! IT SEEMS THERE WERE THESE TWO SEWER WORKERS..."
WHAT A LIFE...WHAT A JOB!
YOU'VE BEEN AT THIS LONGER'N ME, MORTON--HOW DO YOU STAND IT?
YEESH! YOU'RE REALLY A POOR SOUL, AIN'TCHA? LISSEN, KRAMMER, THERE'RE A LOT WORSE JOBS!
OH, YEAH? NAME ONE!
WELL, YOU COULD BE DRIVIN' A BUS OR... OR...OR...
OR WHAT?
KRAMMER--HELP! SOMETHIN'S GOT ME!
HUH?
AIEEEEE
MORTON! MORTON!
"IT WAS A GOOD HOUR LATER THAT JACK KRAMMER STUMBLED INTO THE SANITATION OFFICES."
MORTON... IT GOT MORTON...
HE KEEPS SAYIN' THAT ...OVER AND OVER!
JACK--WHAT GOT MORTON?
BIG... BIGGER'N ALL OF US!
THERE'S NO WAY TO STOP IT... NO WAY TO FIGHT IT. WE--WE CAN ONLY JOIN IT!
JOIN IT... YEAH.
IT...IT SAID IF WE DIE-- WE'LL LIVE FOREVER!
HE'S GONE CRAZY! STOP--!
CLIK!
SSSS
"BUT IT WAS TOO LATE TO STOP JACKIE KRAMMER."
KA-BOOM!

KRAMMER'S BUDDIES WERE LUCKY. THEY MANAGED TO GET OUT ALIVE. WE...COULDN'T FIND A TRACE OF KRAMMER.
YES, I HAD NOTICED THE STORY--
MAYBE YA READ ABOUT IT IN THE BUGLE?
--AND HAD THOUGHT IT A BIT ODD THAT IT WAS BURIED ON PAGE 25.
YEAH, WELL... WE'RE TRYING TO KEEP A LID ON THINGS... AVOID PANIC FOR NOW.
FREAK EXPLOSION KILLS ONE
YOU SAY YOU'VE COME UP AGAINST THIS... MENACE BEFORE?
YEAH, BACK WHEN I WAS WORKING OUT OF THE MIDTOWN NORTH PRECINCT.
I WAS PRETTY LUCKY THAT TIME! THE THUNDER GOD AND HIS BUDDY HERC SAVED THE DAY FOR ME!*
*THOR #229-230--JIM.
REALLY? HAVE YOU CONSIDERED--?
YEAH, I'VE ALREADY TRIED CALLING THE AVENGERS. NO ANSWER! THEY'RE BUSY AS USUAL.
SO YA SEE, DOC-- YOU'RE ABOUT MY ONLY BACK-STOP. THE CAPTAIN SEEMS TO THINK YOU'RE TUNED IN TO THIS KINDA THING.
WELL, I'LL CERTAINLY DO WHAT I CAN. WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS... CREATURE?
NOT MUCH.
I THINK WE'VE FIGURED OUT THE AREA WHERE MORTON AND KRAMMER WERE ATTACKED.
IF YOU'LL CHECK THIS MAP--!
NOK NOK
EH? SOMEONE'S AT THE DOOR. 'SCUSE ME, DOC.
YEAH? WHATTA YA WANT?

PARDON ME, BUT THIS YOUNG LADY WAS LOOKING FOR YOU, DOCTOR!
STEPHEN...
...WHEN I RETURNED FROM MY ERRAND, WONG TOLD ME YOU'D COME HERE.
YOU NEEDN'T HAVE TROUBLED YOURSELF, MY DEAR. I DON'T THINK I'LL NEED YOUR HELP IN THIS.
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF YOU EVER NEEDED ME!
HMM.
UH...LOOK, DOC... I'M SORRY IF THIS THING IS... UH... DISRUPTING YOUR PRACTICE...
SLAM!
THAT'S QUITE ALL RIGHT, BLUMKENN. YOU MIGHT SAY THIS IS MY PRACTICE.
I'LL BE IN TOUCH IF I UNCOVER ANYTHING.
BUT FIRST, I HAVE A PERSONAL MATTER TO ATTEND.
BOY, WHAT A WEIRD BIRD HE IS! AN' HERE I THOUGHT A TRANSFER TO THE VILLAGE WOULD SOLVE ALL MY PROBLEMS!
YA JUST TRADE ONE HEADACHE FOR ANOTHER!


OBSERVE! THE BLUMKENN IS ALREADY FALLING PREY TO DESPAIR! HE WILL BE NO THREAT TO US!
BUT WHAT OF THIS STRANGE... AND THE WOMAN? THEY SEEMED POSSESSED OF GREAT POWER.
YES, WE WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEM!
PTUI
BLASTED CITY WATER GETS WORSE EVERY YEAR!
OUT OF THE RAIN-GLAZED STREETS SHE WALKS. AND THOUGH HER STEP IS LIGHT, HER HEART IS HEAVY AND TROUBLED.
SHE IS NOT TRULY OF THIS WORLD-- BEING BORN OF ANOTHER DIMENSION.
INDEED, HER FAMILIARITY WITH THIS REALITY IS STILL SOMEWHAT LACKING.
BUT ONE FACT SWIFTLY IMPRESSES ITSELF UPON HER.
...SHE IS BEING FOLLOWED.
CLEA... BELOVED!
YOU ARE ANGRY WITH ME.
ANGRY?! OF COURSE, I AM! I MAY BE YOUR LOVER, STEPHEN STRANGE--
--BUT I'M ALSO YOUR DISCIPLE! I DESERVE TO BE BY YOUR SIDE, SHARE IN YOUR TRIALS--NOT TO BE GUARDED LIKE SOME RARE FLOWER!
YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT!
I--I AM? YOU MEAN, YOU AGREE WITH ME?!
I MUST, MY LOVE --FOR YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH! I HAVE BEEN REMISS IN MY DUTIES AS MENTOR.
I SHALL BE SO NO MORE!

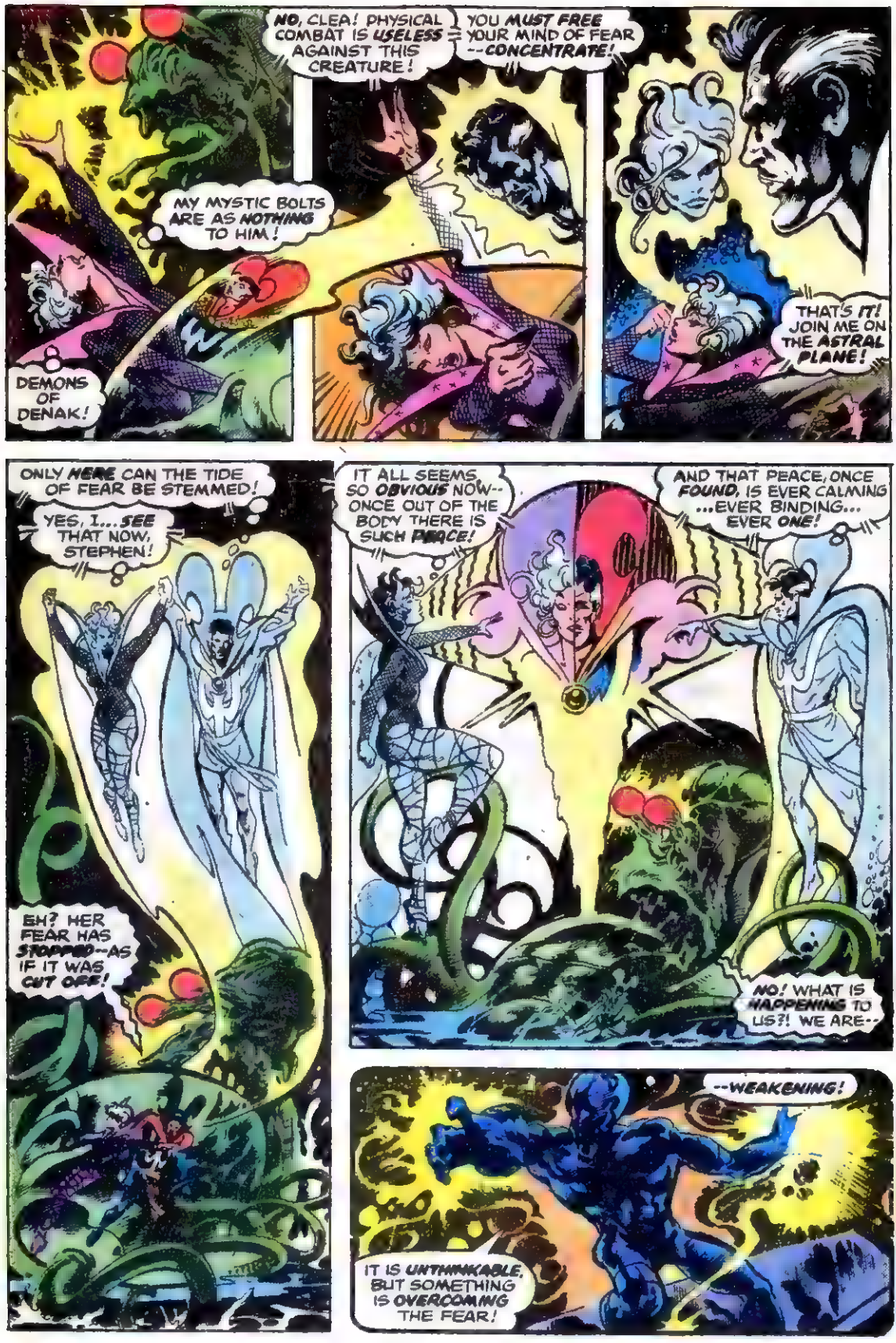
YOU MUST FORGIVE ME IF I BECOME OVERLY PROTECTIVE AT TIMES. I AM, AFTER ALL, BUT A MAN--
--A MAN WHO KNOWS FEAR FOR THOSE HE LOVES.
I...FORGIVE YOU.
NO OTHER WORDS ARE NECESSARY BETWEEN THESE TWO.
THEY TOUCH...THEY ARE...AND THAT IS ENOUGH FOR THEM.
IT IS, ALAS, NOT ENOUGH FOR ALL THINGS.
EH? CURSE ME FOR A NOVICE!
BY THE VISHANTI!
STEPHEN!
CLEA-- BE ON YOUR GUARD! IT KNOWS OF US!
BEWARREE
THE DESPERATE WARNING ECHOES IN HIS WAKE, AS THE MYSTIC MASTER IS SUCKED INTO THE DEPTHS BY A CREATURE OUT OF THE MOST LOATHESOME OF FEVERED NIGHTMARES!

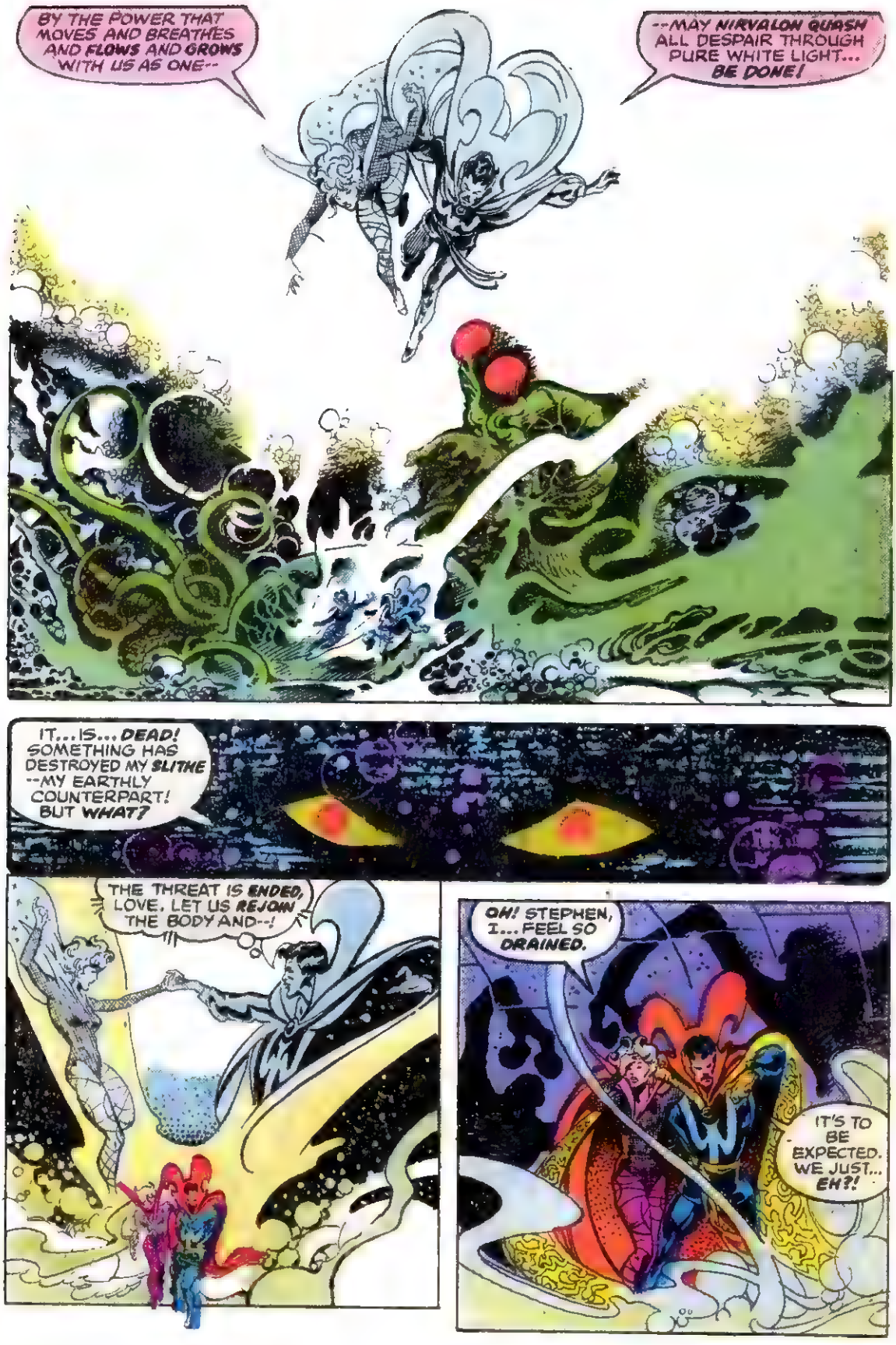

FOR BUT A SECOND, CLEA STARES DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS IN STUNNED DISBELIEF.
AND THEN, SHE LEAPS AFTER HER MAN--
--ONE SWEEPING GESTURE TRANSFORMING HER GARMENTS, AS SHE PLUNGES BOLDLY INTO THE STEAMY DARKNESS...
AND THEN, SHE LEAPS AFTER HER MAN--
...A SORCERESS BORN!
BY DARONTHON'S LOST LORE MAKE THE DARKNESS RECEDE AND TO MY MASTER'S SIDE...
...LET THY MYSTIC LIGHT LEAD!
VISHANTI BE PRAISED! IT'S WORKING!
I HAD NEVER BEFORE ATTEMPTED SUCH A SPELL ON MY OWN...
...STEPHEN'S TRAINING HAS SERVED ME WELL INDEED.
NOW I MUST PUT MY LEARNING TO GOOD USE-- AND AID HIM AGAINST THIS... BEAST.
BUT AS THE MYSTIC MAID DESCENDS EVER DEEPER INTO THE SEWERS--

--TWO DISTURBINGLY HUMANOID, EBON FIGURES FLOW OUT OF THE SHADOWS--
ONCE MORE THIS EVENING, CLEA IS BEING FOLLOWED.
THIS TIME, HOWEVER, SHE DOES NOT NOTICE HER PURSUERS.
THIS TIME HER ATTENTION IS DRAWN BY THE HORROR THAT LIES BEFORE HER...
...THE HORROR THAT HAS SWALLOWED DR. STRANGE!
IT IS THE FEMALE-- THE SORCERER'S COMPANION--GOOD!
STEPHEN!
SHE MAY PROVE A MORE SATISFYING MORSEL THAN HER MASTER!

YES... THERE IS MUCH FEAR IN THIS ONE!
WE WOULD HAVE HER CLOSER! SEIZE HER, THRALLS!
WHAT? BEHIND ME!
AHHH! HER FEAR IS MAGNIFICENT! WE...ARE... REPLENISHED!
.THERE IS POWER HERE! POWER FOR THE DWELLER ...POWER FOR THE DARKNESS!
CLEA, YOU MUST CALM YOURSELF! FEAR IS WHAT THIS CREATURE WANTS!
S-STEPHEN?
YES, CLEA-- I STILL LIVE! THERE IS HOPE... YOU MUST NOT GIVE IN TO FEAR!
BUT CLEA CAN BARELY "HEAR" HER MENTOR'S MENTAL CALL. FOR THE MORE SHE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE REPUGNANT SLIME, THE MORE HER FEAR GROWS!

ELSEWHERE -- IN A REALM OF EXISTENCE AS FAR AWAY AS THE ENDS OF THE UNIVERSE, YET AS NEAR AS THE SWEAT ON YOUR BROW -- CLEA'S BURGEONING FEAR IS ECHOED BY AN ARCANE LIGHT...
...A LIGHT WHICH FLICKERS DIMLY ABOUT A FIGURE KNOWN ONLY AS...THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS!
AS HER FEAR -- HER DESPAIR -- GROWS, THE LIGHT BURNS EVER BRIGHTER, UNTIL THE MYSTERIOUS BEING TWITCHES--
--AND BEGINS TO STIR!
AT LAST! AT LONG LAST, MY SLEEP IS OVER!
THE TIME OF MY POWER HAS COME!
NO! I CANNOT BEAR THE TOUCH OF THIS CREATURE ANOTHER MOMENT!
¡HA HA HA!


NO, CLEA! PHYSICAL COMBAT IS USELESS AGAINST THIS CREATURE!
YOU MUST FREE YOUR MIND OF FEAR --CONCENTRATE!
MY MYSTIC BOLTS ARE AS NOTHING TO HIM!
DEMONS OF DENAK!
THAT'S IT! JOIN ME ON THE ASTRAL PLANE!
ONLY HERE CAN THE TIDE OF FEAR BE STEMMED!
YES, I...SEE THAT NOW, STEPHEN!
EH? HER FEAR HAS STOPPED--AS IF IT WAS CUT OFF!
IT ALL SEEMS SO OBVIOUS NOW-- ONCE OUT OF THE BODY THERE IS SUCH PEACE!
AND THAT PEACE, ONCE FOUND, IS EVER CALMING ...EVER BINDING... EVER ONE!
NO! WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US?! WE ARE--
--WEAKENING!
IT IS UNTHINKABLE, BUT SOMETHING IS OVERCOMING THE FEAR!


BY THE POWER THAT MOVES AND BREATHES AND FLOWS AND GROWS WITH US AS ONE--
--MAY NIRVALON QUASH ALL DESPAIR THROUGH PURE WHITE LIGHT... BE DONE!
IT...IS...DEAD! SOMETHING HAS DESTROYED MY SLITHE --MY EARTHLY COUNTERPART! BUT WHAT?
THE THREAT IS ENDED, LOVE. LET US REJOIN THE BODY AND--!
OH! STEPHEN, I...FEEL SO DRAINED.
IT'S TO BE EXPECTED. WE JUST... EH?!

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!
THE SHADOW-DEMONS! THEY STILL EXIST!
LOOK! THEIR FORMS CHANGE, EVEN AS THEY ATTACK!
OH!
OSHTUR! TAKE ME! I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THIS!
MY CARELESSNESS COULD HAVE BEEN COSTLY, IF THESE BEASTS WERE ANYTHING MORE THAN MERE PAWNS!
WITHOUT THE CREATURE'S GUIDANCE, THEIR ASSAULT IS ERRATIC... MINDLESS!
DO NOT BERATE YOURSELF, LOVE. YOU ARE, AS YOU SAID, BUT A MAN. NO MAN CAN ANTICIPATE EVERYTHING!
AND THESE NETHER-DEMONS WILL FARE NO BETTER THAN THEIR MASTER!

AS BEFORE, SORCERER AND SORCERESS ACT AS ONE--
BLINDING LIGHT STARS OUT AT THEIR COMMAND!
BUT THIS TIME...
THE SHADOW-THINGS ARE COLLAPSING INTO MORTAL MEN!
BY THE CURSE OF THE MHYTORR-- IT IS THE SEWER WORKERS!
OHHH...WHA HOPPEN?
MY SHADE THRALLS ARE GONE--DE-TRANSMOGRIFIED!
WHAT TERRAN POWER DARES CHALLENGE ME?
M-M-MORTON! IT'S YOU! YOU'RE ALIVE... BUT HOW?!
HUH? WHAT'CHA TALKIN' ABOUT? AND WHO ARE THOSE TWO WEIRDOS?
WEIRDOS?
OH! 'SCUSE ME, FOLKS. FOR A SECOND THERE, I COULDA SWORN YOU WERE WEARIN' FUNNY CAPES!
NO OPOLOGIES ARE NECESSARY, MR. MORTON. YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY BEEN UNDER A STRAIN...

IF THERE EXISTS TO ME A THREAT UPON THAT PUNY SPHERE--THEN BY ALL THE ELDER ONES, IT SHALL FALL MOST TERRIBLY!
LET THE VAPORS CONGEAL, AND REVEAL TO ME THIS...THREAT TO MY POWER!
SO! DR. STRANGE, IS IT? I HAVE NEVER BEHELD THIS ONE, BUT HIS NAME HAS COME TO ME BEFORE--LIKE A WHISPER--IN MY SLEEP.
EVIDENTLY, HE WIELDS GREAT MAGICKAL POWER UPON THE EARTH.
SUCH A MORTAL COULD BE AN OBSTACLE TO MY PLANS. I CANNOT ALLOW THAT!
--IF YOU'LL FOLLOW ME, PLEASE.
O-OKAY, STRANGE... YOU'RE THE DOCTOR! HEH-HEH

I STILL DON'T GET IT. YA SAY THE BOSS THINKS WE'VE BOTH CROAKED!
YES. A...MISUNDERSTANDING, NO DOUBT. I'M SURE IT CAN BE STRAIGHTENED OUT.
A SIMPLE SPELL WILL SEE TO THAT!
WELL, THEN --THANKS FOR ALL YER HELP THERE, DOC!
DON'T MENTION IT, GENTLEMEN. THE PLEASURE WAS MINE.
I MUST ADMIT THAT I'M CONFUSED ALSO, STEPHEN.
OBVIOUSLY, THE FEAR-CREATURE TRANSFORMED THOSE TWO MEN, BUT WHERE--?
WHERE DID THE CREATURE COME FROM...AND WHY WAS HE THERE? I DON'T KNOW, BUT I INTEND TO FIND OUT!
DO THAT, STRANGE! TRY TO FIND THE ORIGINS OF THE GREAT FEAR!
WHILE YOU'RE TRYING, MY ENERGIES WILL BE REACHING OUT--ALL ABOUT YOU!
AND BEFORE YOU REALIZE WHAT HAS HAPPENED, YOUR VERY LIFE FORCES WILL BE MINE!

NEXT

THE SUB-MARINER!